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ABSTRACT

Differences in the self-concept of school-aged youngsters before and after interacting with preservice teachers in multicultural community-based situations and changes in their self-concept as a result of the structured teaching of self-concept activities were investigated. Tests revealed that the children possessed a more positive self-concept after interacting with and being taught by the prospective teachers. Positive shifts were observed on the factors of "behavior," "intellectual and school status," "appearance and attributes," "anxiety," "popularity," and "happiness and satisfaction." (Author/JD)

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INFLUENCE OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS ON THE SELF-CONCEPT OF SCHOOL AGED YOUNGSTERS IN MINORITY COMMUNITY AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT

There has been much discussion about the potential influence prospective teachers have on the perceptions and behaviors of school-age youngsters. The objectives for this study were to investigate possible differences in the self-concept of school-aged youngsters before and after interacting with a randomly selected group of preservice teachers in multicultural community-based situations, and changes in the self-concept of these youngsters as a result of the structured teaching of self-concept activities. Tests of significance on the total scores of a well-known children's measure of self-concept revealed that the youngsters possessed a more positive self-concept after interacting with and being taught by the prospective teachers. The youngsters also exhibited positive shifts on the six sub-scale factors of "behavior," "intellectual and school status," "appearance and attributes," "anxiety," "popularity," and "happiness and satisfaction."

Much has been said about the influence preservice teachers have on the perceptions and behaviors of school-age youngsters. Harty (1975) found that preservice teachers working with poor multicultural school-aged youngsters in pre-student teaching community-based settings developed strategies for building a positive self-concept among minority group children, but also concluded that these same preservice teachers did not develop strategies which might be used to get members of the larger society to accept, understand and appreciate the cultural heritage of minority groups. Gordon (1965) reported that a low self-concept is one of the major characteristics of disadvantaged minority youngsters. Earlier, Clark (1953) found that a low self-concept in minority group students is based on cultural origin as well as socioeconomic status.

It might be conjectured that a positive self-concept of preservice teachers influences changes in the self-concepts of school-aged youngsters. The objectives for this study were to investigate possible differences in the self-concept of school-aged youngsters before and after interacting with a randomly selected group of preservice teachers in multicultural community-based situations, and changes in the self-concept of the school-aged youngsters as a result of structured teaching of self-concept activities.

Backdrop

Self-concept is directly tapped by asking people how much they like themselves. Dimensions of self-concept emerge when individuals are asked about their responses to different aspects of themselves. An individual's behavior is influenced by his/her perceptions of himself/herself and his/her environment. The enhancement of a youngster's

self-concept appears to be valued as an important educational outcome. Several professional organizations related to teaching and the preparation of teachers (American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the Association of Teacher Educators) have advocated self-concept development programs for the disadvantaged.

Dawson (1973) advocated three types of cultural experiences necessary for the preparation of preservice teachers who plan to teach in multi-cultural settings. Dawson defined "exploratory" experiences as activities which introduce preservice teachers to a situation or environment in which the prospective teacher has had little or no experience. "Developmental experiences" are those designed to give the would-be teacher an opportunity to gain some facility in working with children within the culture of poverty and allow opportunities for collecting data on the life styles and problems of the poor. And lastly, and perhaps the most important type of experience, are the "intensive experiences" where the preservice teacher works with the poverty-stricken on a daily basis and lives in that community for a period of six to eight weeks.

The sequence of education courses included in this undergraduate elementary education program was "Urban and Rural Problems" (introductory course), "Human Development and Poverty" (educational psychology course), "Aesthetic Experiences for the Disadvantaged" (art education course), "Mathematics for Elementary Teachers" (mathematics education course), and "Interdisciplinary Approach to Curriculum" (curriculum theory and instructional media course). These courses were taught on campus and students were required to spend one full day a week in a poverty setting

(community agency or elementary school) implementing ideas or skills acquired. During the semester just prior to student teaching, the preservice teachers enrolled in the most extensive, intensive and unique experiences (Dawson, 1973) in the program, "Experiment in Multicultural Living." In this fifteen semester hour course the preservice teachers were on campus for a three-week workshop which fulfilled partial certification credit for methods in the teaching of science, social studies, and reading/language arts. During the eight to twelve week living component, they completed the requirements of these methods courses by implementing knowledge, skills, and/or strategies acquired in their courses and the campus-based workshop while working with poor whites, blacks, Latinos, and native Americans in rural or inner city community agencies, migrant worker camp educational facilities, or reservation schools. The "Experiment in Multicultural Living" was the focal point for developing a model for the preparation of preservice teachers to work with children who have been least effectively served by society.

Methods

Seven preservice teachers were randomly sampled from a population of twenty enrolled in the intensive field experience. These seven prospective teachers each randomly selected six school-age youngsters from their total number of students for purposes of examining youngster self-concept. The commercially developed *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale* (Piers and Harris, 1969) was selected for administration to the school-age youngsters. This scale consists of 80 clearly written yes-no items which cover many areas of self-concept, especially abilities and personality. Crandall (1973) reported that *alpha* coefficients (internal

consistency reliability) for a population of 1183 ranged from a 0.78 to 0.93. Piers (1969) calculated a test-retest stability of 0.72 for four months and a 0.77 for a large sample over two and four month intervals. Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) noted that split-half coefficients for the instrument's total score were 0.90 and 0.87 for sixth and tenth grade students respectively. In reference to validity, Piers (1969) mentioned that the instrument correlated positively with the *Lipsitt Self Concept Scale* (0.68), and teacher and peer ratings of self-concept correlated from 0.06 to 0.49 with the scale's total scores. Crandall (1973) reported that correlations with achievement and intelligence scores tended to be low and positive. Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) noted that there is some evidence to suggest that total scores on this instrument warrant self-concept interpretations, based on convergent validity coefficients with other measures of self-concept.

The *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale* (Piers and Harris, 1969) was administered by the seven prospective teachers to forty-two school-age youngsters just prior to any interaction with them and after eight weeks of daily interaction in the community setting. Three exploratory questions were asked with possible answers supplied by way of t-tests, means, and mean-difference scores. For tests of significance, the 0.05 level was chosen. Quantitative findings have also been supplemented by qualitative commentary.

Outcomes

Analyses have been performed on the total scores and the six sub-scales of the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale*. These six factors have been extracted and account for 42% of the variance (Piers and Harris, 1969). The factors are BEHAVIOR which deals with perceived doing bad things, obedience at home, frequency in trouble, thinking bad thoughts, and trustworthiness; INTELLECTUAL AND SCHOOL STATUS which are

associated with perceived accomplishment in schoolwork, being smart, being dumb about most things, good reader, and forgetting what is learned; PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND ATTRIBUTES which reflect perceived being good-looking, having a pleasant face, having a bad figure, being strong, and being a leader in games and sports; ANXIETY which focuses on perceived as crying easily, worrying a lot, being often afraid, getting nervous when the teacher calls on, and being generally nervous; POPULARITY which reveals perceived being picked on, being the last to be chosen for games, difficulty in making friends, having many friends, and feeling left out of things; and HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION which indicate perceived as being happy, being unhappy, liking to be oneself, wishing to be different, and being cheerful.

Prior to interacting with the 7 prospective teachers, the randomly selected 42 school-age youngsters responded to the self-concept scale. Their total scores ranged from a low of 26 to a high of 78 with a mean of 52.8. Piers and Harris (1969) reported that "average scores" were between 46 and 60. These data fell beyond both ends of the "average spectrum" with 13 scores below "46" and 16 scores above "60". These scores appear to be compatible with the norms. The factor, "behavior," with a mean of 13.2 showed up as the most positive and "physical appearance and attributes" as the least positive (M=7.3) of the self-concept subscales.

After interacting with the preservice teachers, the total scores of the youngsters ranged from 36 to 76 with a mean of 58.3. Once again, these results went beyond both limits of the norm range dubbed "average" with 4 scores below "46" and 17 scores above "60". These scores appear to be above average when considering the published norms. The subscale, "behavior," represented the factor which was the most positive (M=13.7) and the factor, "Happiness and Satisfaction," showed up the least positive of the self-concept attributes.

Changes in the self-concepts of the youngsters were revealed by a mean-difference of 5.5 with respect to their total scores. This represented an overall shift in a more positive direction. In addition, the self-concepts of these youngsters were significantly ($p < .05$) more positive after their interaction with the preservice teachers. Two youngsters also increased their total scores by some 40 and 45 points as a result of their exposure to given preservice teachers. All six factors or specific self-concept attributes exhibited shifts in a positive direction with the greatest shifts focusing on the factors of "Intellectual and School Status" and "Physical Appearance and Attributes" each with mean-difference scores of 1.3. The specific attribute with the least shift (mean-difference score = 0.3) in a positive direction was "Happiness and Satisfaction." The factor of "Physical Appearance and Attributes" was also found to be significant ($p < .05$) after the intervention of the preservice teachers.

Interpretations

Caution might be exercised before making generalizations from the results of this study. Generalizations from these findings might be

restricted because of the small sample sizes of the preservice teachers and the involved school age youngsters; it would have been advantageous to have had a sample of 30 or more preservice teachers and over 100 youngsters. Sample sizes of this magnitude certainly would add credence to the results. The statistical and design problems generally associated with pretest and posttest sensitization also pose limitations. Other shortcomings include a lack of direct control over the selection of community-based field sites and the "suggested" random selection of youngsters by preservice teachers. Direct control also could not be exercised with respect to the ages or maturation levels of the youngsters or the physical factors of the teaching-learning environment. When considering cause-effect relationships, the assumption of causality cannot be made because of the lack of constant direct observation of preservice teacher behavior and functioning and the idiosyncrasies associated with this role. Patterns of preservice teacher-youngster interactions and their influences probably varied from community site to community site and as a result of uncontrollable and/or extraneous environmental factors. This investigation is also restricted since no attempts were made at validation or the collection of comparison data from a control group of preservice teachers and school-age youngsters. And finally, there are the historical limitations restricting research in the area of self-concept ranging from ambiguities in construct definitions to lack of precision with respect to effective instrumentation. Aside from these suggested potential limitations, it appears that the revealed trends have importance.

Based on the findings of this exploratory investigation, the self-concepts of school-age youngsters can be enhanced through the teaching of

structured self-concept activities by preservice teachers within the context of a community agency given similar settings, subjects and functions. The data tend to reflect that the youngsters were significantly more positive with respect to overall self-concept and had revealed positive shifts on all six factors (one factor significantly more positive) after the interaction with the preservice teachers. The sample of youngsters also appears normal as evidenced by the balance with the established norms associated with the instrument before and after the intervention of the preservice teachers along with near "averageness" inferred from the norms. The scores of the youngsters were so compatible with the norms on the pretest that it appeared unnecessary to evaluate high or low scores in terms of defensiveness or exaggerated self-concept, or for that matter, social desirability in reference to their responses. The factor of "Anxiety" witnessed very little variation before and after the intervention of the prospective teachers. This tends to suggest that the youngsters functioned basically in an emotionally-safe and non-threatening environment with little or no crying, worrying, being afraid or being nervous.

In recent years much more emphasis has been placed on the affective outcomes of the learning process. The enhancement of a youngster's self-concept in a multicultural setting is important in today's process of schooling both as an outcome in itself and as a moderator of academic achievement. Paschal (1968) and Epps (1969) found self-concept to be related to the academic achievement of ethnic minority students. Marston (1968) also advocated that American education has a fundamental responsibility to enhance the self-concepts of low income minority students.

Those who are chanting for change or reform in the schools are becoming numerous, both internal and external to the schooling process. Many of these would agree that some type of change toward a more humanistic-inquiry approach may be in order. If a more humanistic-inquiry environment is deemed desirable, the selection and later employment of prospective teachers who possess and promote orientations toward self-concept development and enhancement might appear to serve these ends. This study was intended to serve as an exploratory endeavor which hopefully would lead to related refined studies. It is hoped that this study would stimulate continued investigation on the processes resulting from similar kinds of preservice teacher-youngster interaction during the "early experience" phase of teacher preparation in multicultural community-based settings.

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